

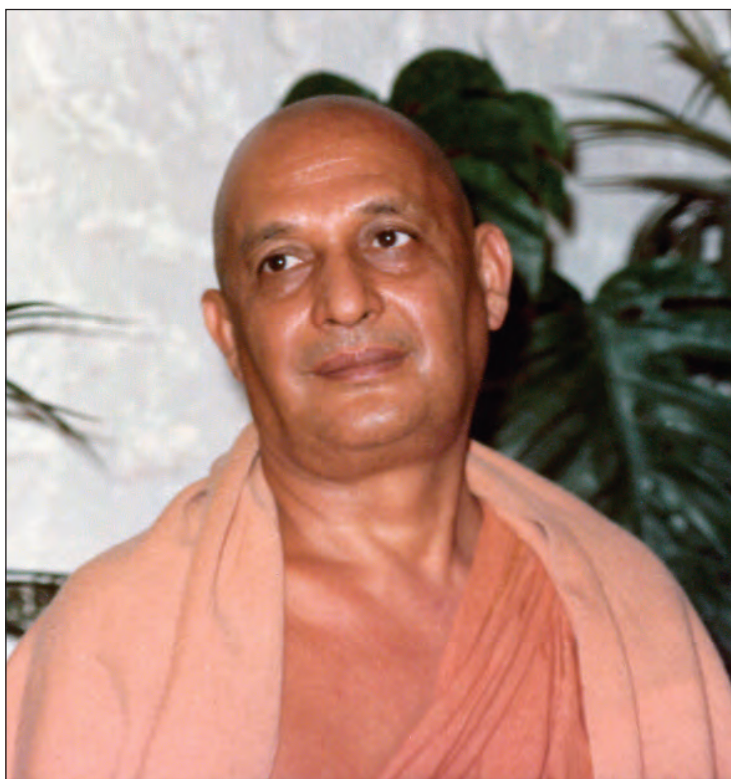
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Tantra Shastra

An Introduction

Swami Satyananda Saraswati



Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

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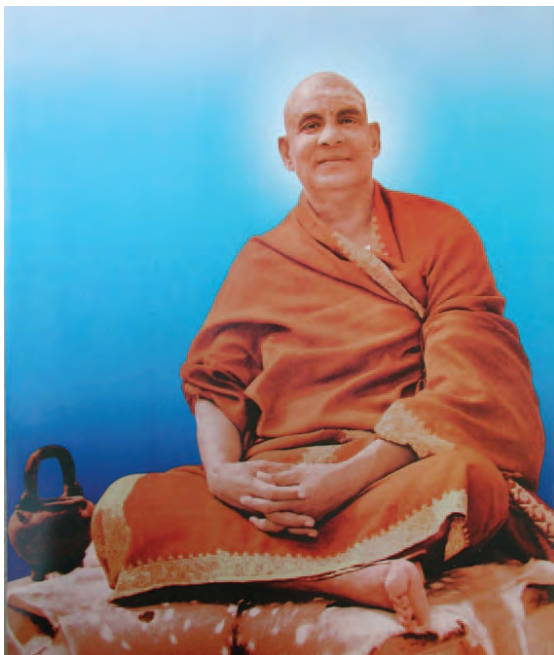
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Dedication

*In humility we offer this dedication to
Swami Sivananda Saraswati, who initiated
Swami Satyananda Saraswati into the secrets of yoga.*

Part One

Tantra Shastra is a sacred and most powerful science in the Indian occult tradition. It is a science which Indians have practised for centuries and still do. Although this science was subject to varieties of suppression from time to time, due to various misunderstandings and allegations, it still lives through various accidents and subjugations by dint of its original operation and method of discovery of the psychic realms.

Tantra Shastra as a whole is the system which deals with the techniques, mediums and applications concerning the individual power and knowledge which is said to be at the depth of human consciousness.

Usually it is thought that only a sannyasin or a recluse, or a celibate (*brahmacharin*) or a total renunciate can be in possession of psychic powers and that an ordinary householder has no access to those powers which belong to deeper planes of consciousness. But Tantra Shastra proclaims boldly that neither food nor character, nor social relationship, nor marital nor emotional life stand in the way of developing such super-powers.

While one section propagated the exclusive cult of renunciation in order to develop such powers of higher consciousness, the other believed that the normal progressions of life never presented any hindrance in the path of awakening

the deeper awareness. It is this section which we find gradually evolving into Tantra Marga while the first developed into the cult of yoga.

In Tantra Shastra one will find every practice intercoiled, combined and adjusted with the attitudes and behaviours of an average person. There is a compelling note to follow the natural steps of life. Therefore, wine, meat, marital relations, mantras and fish are accepted in the general constitution of the shastra. Much misunderstood, this compelling constitution of Tantra Shastra clarifies in bold terms that use of the above does not at all present any obstacle to the awakening of Shakti, rather it helps.

In Bhakti Shastra also the normal progression of life and the demands of nature are not at all denied, rather they are combined and adjusted with life. In the light of this, if one looks in the Tantra Shastra, one will find that it is a happy combination of occult techniques and devotional attitudes. As such it is absolutely necessary that along with occult rituals and ceremonies, the practitioner should also surrender himself to Shakti – the divine power.

Worship of Shakti

The presiding deity of Tantra Shastra is Devi, the so-called feminine deity, unto whom all mantras, mudras and other elements of worship are devotionally dedicated. The act of bathing, dressing, sitting for worship, offering various stuffs, sacrificing an animal, cohabiting with the husband or wife or companion, accepting the offered foodstuffs and many other acts are performed in the spirit of total dedication and devoted offering. The sixty-four tantras are thus designed to suit variegated temperaments and individuals walking, faltering and advancing on different scales of evolution.

The purpose of all tantric systems is one, and that is to evolve and express the *Matri*-aspect (motherly aspect) which

is probably the nucleus and centre of total consciousness in living beings. The mother aspect denotes the central sphere of individualized awareness which is Shakti or energy. The Tantra Shastras do not get confused in the so-called material instinct, nor is their purpose to develop the emotional mother complex. The term 'Matri' symbolizes the greatest power in man, not only the mother in the emotional sense.

'Tantrics are worshippers of Shakti', should be the proper expression, even in the case of those who worship Shiva or Vishnu. What is Shakti? Shakti is the great process lying almost restless at the deepest sphere of individual consciousness capable of creation, progression and destruction. It is that powerful awareness in man which is lying dormant at present.

Where is this Shakti? It is in all. It is the left half of Shiva. Shiva is Prana. Shakti is energy. Shiva is tongue and Shakti is the power of speech. Shiva and Shakti live and move together; but Shiva cannot materialize himself into actions and things without the active cooperation of and in conjunction with Shakti. Therefore, Shakti is the subject matter of Tantra Shastra, whether in Shakti Tantra or in Shaiva Tantra. Though Shakti is depicted by a feminine frame, termed as a Goddess, depicted as a beautiful lady, the tantras unanimously declare that Shakti is an all pervading and an all-embracing existence, in a saint and in a sinner, in a man and in a woman, in a believer and in a non-believer, etc.

Tantric sadhana

Tantra Shastra also has an elaborate scheme and a definite scheme of manifesting this transcendental existence in every individual by mantras, yantras, devata, kriyas, mudras and including the most abused five ingredients of tantra. Those elaborate and definite schemes of tantra are employed to develop the deeper individual awareness on the outer plane

so that supra-physical faculties can be brought into action. Mantras are meant to create systematic vibrations, yantras are meant to consolidate the energy and kriyas are to awaken the psychic centres in man.

Tantra sadhana can be said to be one of the ways of awakening the kundalini. It is a very powerful method and therefore there is always a possibility of misuse of those powers. The other methods are very tedious, strenuous, time-consuming and too far fetched; there is practically no possibility of misuse of the powers arising by the methods other than tantra. Man does not have the patience to wait that long for the desired awakening; so most of them leave their practices half way. Since tantra sadhana is direct, immediate, convenient, unrigid and palatable, the practitioner achieves instantaneous success in it. Therefore, tantra sadhana is a living science in India, not at all obsolete, never dead. There are centres for initiation for serious minded aspirants where tantra sadhana is taught. It is practised in absolute secrecy by various groups under the guidance of their own tradition.

Part Two

The word 'tantra' is a combination of two-fold processes, namely, 'tanoti' and 'trayati', meaning expansion and liberation. The root 'tan' stands for the word 'tanoti' and the root 'tra' stands for the word 'trayati'. The word *tanoti* means to stretch, to extend, to elaborate, to eliminate and the like. The word *trayati* means to liberate, to free, to separate and the like. So it is clear that tantra is a process of expansion and finally absolute freedom to the highest existence.

Tantras are purely vedic in origin. You can conveniently put them into two progressive categories of shruti and smriti. Accordingly, they are to be termed as Shrouta Tantras and Smarta Tantras, which respectively mean the tantras strictly according to the vedic tradition and the tantras according to the changing social structure. Tantras that have their existence in shruti, and who obey shruti implicitly are Shrouta Tantras, while those tantras having all respect for shruti but adjusting with the ever-shifting social concepts are known as Smarta Tantras.

The Shrouta Tantras, that is to say, the vedic tantras, were replete with an absolute sense of purity and orthodoxy. As a result, there developed a tradition of absolute cleanliness or ahimsa and the like. However, those who were used to performing animal sacrifices and such other older customs did not agree to this concept of orthodox purity or ahimsa.

Thus the vedic tantras were naturally divided in the course of time into two groups. Out of them one may be termed vedic tantra, which followed the path of ahimsa, and the other which followed the traditions of animal sacrifices and the like. However, during those days, they did not use the word 'tantra', but they used the word 'yajna'. It was only in the latter period that yajna came to be replaced by the word tantra. Later on, these natural divisions of vedic tantra developed into two main currents, namely Shakta Tantra and Shaiva Tantra.

Due to the pressure of repeated criticism of the act of sacrifice and the use of wine, etc., it became necessary for the followers of Shakti Tantra to evolve a spiritual philosophy for providing the propriety and effectiveness of their system. This division of tantra also developed into two distinct creeds – one accepting animal sacrifices, wine, etc, and the other continuing the older orthodox customs. They were Shaivas and Shaktas, worshippers of Shiva and Shakti respectively.

Shaktas and shaivas

However, Shaivas who rallied around Shiva lived an austere life, which however was not enjoined in the original vedic tantra. They also refrained from sacrifices, wine, etc. which was accepted by popular traditions of Shaktas. Whereas Shaivas developed their system of tantra around the concept of Shiva, Shaktas continued their system around the concept of Shakti, lived a life of comfort and luxury like the vedic worshippers and pursued the path of sacrifice, wine, etc. Thus the main stream of tantra was divided into three.

1. The refined vedic worship which is widely practised in India even today in the form of yajnas, rudri and other forms of karmakanda rituals.
2. The Shaiva Tantra which systematically developed around this central conception of Lord Shiva, with austerity as its backbone, yoga its creed, renunciation its

policy and samadhi as its summum bonum; worshippers of this cult can be seen among all sections of Hindus. There are twelve main centres besides many more temples where Shaiva Tantra is practised in the form of a daily ceremony.

3. The Shakta Tantra, which was a kind of original vedic tantra, later developed into a classical system of worship of Shakti. However, they did not discontinue the primitive tradition of sacrifices, wine, honey, marital or extra-marital cohabitation and occult mantras. There are sixty-four main centres (*shaktipeethas*) besides numerous temples where Shakti Tantra is practised in the form of daily as well as occasional ceremonies. There are also sixty-four tantric texts belonging to this stream.

Right and left tantra

It is this tantric tradition which again divides itself into left and right tantra, or *vama tantra* and *dakshina tantra*. Why and how did this division take place? One cannot belong purely to one creed; one is always influenced by the thoughts next-door. Likewise, Shakta and Shaivas who lived together were influenced by each other. It could be that narrow-minded Shaktas also realized the glory, purity, nobility and grace of the Shaiva system, whose highlights were austerity, purity, samadhi and yoga. As a result they worshipped Shakti with a spirit of Shaiva and refrained from meat, etc. They became the practitioners of right hand tantra.

In other words the original theme of tantra sadhana was accepted but was modified by them on account of the relation developed with other creeds. So the Shaktas felt that it was possible for them to live a life of austerity, purity, etc., while following their traditional system of worship. They were the Shaktas in the right sense.

Nevertheless, there remained other Shaktas who did not accept the above mentioned influence and remained

absolutely sceptical of the said influence. They continued their usual practices and were known as the leftist or vama panthi.

Yet, there were those Shaivas who were also influenced by the beliefs and behaviour of Shaktas and felt it was meaningless to do austerity and yoga practices, when the gain was easily obtainable through animal sacrifices, etc. So they combined Devi worship in their system, because in it they found the fulfilment of emotions and ambitions. Since worshippers of Shiva were not supposed to practise animal sacrifice etc., they accepted Shakti worship also side by side and followed the traditions of Shakta Tantra.

Reinterpretation of tantric philosophy

This is the historical stream as to how the right and left tantra sadhanas came to be developed in the structure of society. The development was spontaneous, though subjected to organization in the course of time. Different creeds were organized, but the central purpose remained ever the same; it was the awakening of something in man which was unknown but not unheard of. It is true that there might have been people who joined the creed without any spiritual purpose, but such people were very few. Most people in India joined these different traditions with a definite purpose of awakening the sleeping power and harnessing it for a higher purpose. From time to time each and every system underwent changes and adjustments with reference to the ceremonies and original elements of worship. While the reference to animal sacrifice, etc., was literally accepted in older traditions, in later traditions it came to mean a process of sacrificing the animal in man. Thus came the re-interpretation of tantric philosophy.

Here wine did not mean anything else except that amrit which is internally produced through certain occult methods. Again maithuna did not mean anything like cohabitation as is

generally understood; here it means an act or a state of union between the individual and the collective consciousness – *Jivatman* and *Paramatman*. Thus the whole picture changes.

Furthermore, mantra did not mean the vedic mantras, the audible pronouncements; mantra came to be understood as a process of contemplation on the occult sound in order to break through the fetters of the lower phases of consciousness. The root 'man' means a process of contemplation. The root 'tra' means freedom, liberation, elimination, release and the like. So *mantra* came to mean a process of chanting certain syllables in a particular way in order to bring about the fusion of empirical existence with the transcendental existence.

And what is honey? Certainly not from the beehive; it is the essence of life and that is Prana, which is an all pervading essence and substratum of existence.

Thus the entire philosophy of tantra undergoes a process of sublimation. Although you will not find any change in the mantra which recites 'I offer this animal', here there is always the attitude of sacrificing the animal instinct in human awareness. Herein, Lord Shiva becomes *Pashu-pati*, which means master of the animals. While the worshipper chants the mantra of sacrifice, he becomes aware of the possibility of mastering the animal awareness. Here, killing the animal is not taken literally, but is understood as a process of transcendence of awareness of animal life.

How to kill that animal and how to transcend the lower awareness? Is it possible that one can soar high in spiritual life without suppressing the natural life which one has developed through the course of evolution? It is for this man that the tantra sadhana comes as a true life-boat. It does not ask anyone to deny the natural demands of life; you have to spiritualize them and thus exhaust the samskaras. If you cannot give up your old habit of drinking, it does not matter, you just continue that as a ingredient of your tantric worship.

A non-ethical system

People in general are intellectually ethical. This is the condition in every part of the world. The intellect is clouded by the so-called ethics of the world. At the same time everyone is violating this philosophy. A large percentage of the world is always indulging in what it considers to be unethical and immoral, and consequently everyone without exception is suffering from self-imagined agonies. This is where psychological and psychosomatic diseases have their origin.

Tantra advises, why consider them immoral and unethical, and why not accept them and spiritualize them? When you know that everybody is leading a particular kind of life and is indulging in wine, women, meat eating etc., what is the use of asking them to renounce everything, either for fear of hell or for the sake of heaven. It is sure that neither the fear of hell or the craving for heaven can make one renounce the pleasures of life, rather it creates conflicts and psychological cobwebs in the personality of man. The point is how one should utilize these and other natural expressions of individual consciousness for higher awakening. It is Tantra Shastra which has definite methods, techniques and rules for practising the five-fold items, unknown to many mystic traditions in the annals of ancient and modern history.

Professional teachers of ethics and morality, self-styled preachers and devotees of ahimsa, will never accept this view of tantra. But it is absolutely proven: that every man, to which ever weakness he is given, has equal or more opportunities for the development of his spiritual power.

The frailties of man should become a part of his spiritual life and practice. Not only tantrics, but all those householders who managed with the natural expressions of life finally abandoned and became totally free. Therefore, one should not be asked to renounce his weaknesses and hate part of his personality; rather he should be asked to practise

tantric worship and develop himself spiritually. Such a man will march through tantra sadhana and sooner or later finds himself on the path of yoga. This is what everybody wants.

Lord Shiva has explained tantra to Parvati. Various elements of the Tantra Shastra are well-defined. In the course of practice awakening takes place. Surely there is no question of getting oneself qualified for such awakening.

Elements of tantra

There is a great similarity between Tantra Shastra and Yoga Shastra; in both you will find reference to asanas, mudras, bandhas, chakras and dharana, kriya yoga, kundalini yoga, hatha yoga, mantra yoga, jnana yoga are parts of Tantra Shastra. In the sixty-four tantras there are hundreds of such methods meant for highly developed and also for undeveloped people. Each tantra can be said to have been created to suit a limited number of temperaments.

The tantra sadhanas are not meant for those who are self-realized. They were written for those categories of people who have to live a normal life, predominately instinctive, and who are unable to shake off anything of like.

There are written tantras as well as unwritten tantras. Written tantras number sixty-four, but unwritten tantras are oral by tradition and are only taught to those disciples in whom the guru finds infinite understanding and a few more simple qualifications. Even today, there are such teachers in India, who are well-versed in this oral system of tantra and who keep passing this great knowledge through their disciple or disciples. It is this traditional oral system which is more powerful, portable and easily available. But it is not an easy task to discover the teachers of this oral tantric system.

Tantra sadhana provides its devotees with a very systematic, scientific and psychologically formulated method of worship of Purusha and Prakriti, in the microcosmos as well as in

macrocosmos. Purusha and Prakriti are not different from Shiva and Shakti. It need not be reiterated that the concept of Shiva and Shakti represents the spiritual and physical energies, lying latent in the matter as well as in the cosmos.

Methods of worship

Tantric worship is a kind of ritual in which various aspects of reality are accepted. It is the general belief that the worship of those deities creates great receptivity and awakening in the psychic world of man, and thereby the worshipper receives abundant blessings. Herein, the science of mantras is so precise and scientific that it creates that awakening in the psychic fields. Therefore, Mantra Shastra is the foundation of Tantra Shastra. The various provinces which are lying in the inner space of man are always in tune with those vibrations, which a powerful mantra is capable of creating. Therefore, a mantra which belongs to the tantric tradition may or may not have any intelligent meaning, but is capable of piercing through the various states of psychic consciousness.

The method of worship in tantra is not only devotional, it is a pre-planned method so much so that the worshipper has to remain conscious of those minute rituals at every step; as such he cannot manage to perform the worship mechanically. The process of guiding the awareness is fully defined and you cannot manage to remain unconscious of what you are doing. One has to employ mantras, mudras, bhavana and kriyas during the practice. Therefore, the method of worship brings a state of fineness in the structure of the individual awareness.

Tantric worship does not begin in the temple, nor does it end there. It begins the moment you rise up from your bed, and every action thereafter is guided by the rules of tantra. During the process of worship, every item of tantra is brought into active operation. At the end of the worship, the aspirant meditates on Shiva and Shakti.

Even the meditation is a guided meditation. It is not a meditation as most people do. It is absolutely a guided meditation and therefore the tantric sadhaka has a greater facility to overcome the problems of the mind. He does not have to think of the next step and naturally the intellect is made to retire. This is a very important event in spiritual life. Yogic consciousness cannot at all emerge out of intellectual strangulations. The guru and tantra alone help one to come out of these intellectual strangulations.

The entire schedule of meditation helps the individual to practise meditation for long hours. It is only when the intellect and the thinking process are used in meditation that the aspirant is unable to continue his meditation for long hours. While tantric worship guides the individual awareness into deeper spheres, the puranic method only inspires him to meditation, and does not provide any guidance for the awareness to function in higher provinces. When you meditate on a particular deity, you need a schedule for the individual awareness to follow without any intellectual process involved in the matter.

Again the yantras and mantras are so designed that they are able to create an image and excite the movement in psychic fields. These elements of tantra guide the awareness into different planes of consciousness.

Tantric guru

A lot has been said about the necessity of a guru on the path of yoga. In the path of tantra sadhana, a guru is the first and an indispensable element. Selection of a guru is the first and foremost item in tantra sadhana. In Tantra Shastra, there are discussions on a feminine guru, family guru and other gurus. The feminine guru is considered very powerful. Wherever there is a custom of traditional tantric initiation, the mother becomes the initiating guru. This tradition of initiation is very popular in certain

parts of Bihar, where the mother becomes the guru of the tradition.

For the fulfilment of any tantric worship, initiation from a woman guru (Bhairavi) is to be sought; tantric initiation by Bhairavi is a very powerful initiation. However, the problem remains. Selection of a guru for tantric initiation is really a difficult job, for the simple reason that such gurus do not make themselves known at all. Therefore, initiation into tantra depends upon the guru, while the disciple only has to prepare himself. When the guru feels that the disciple is ready, then he initiates the disciple into tantric traditions. As such, the problem of finding a proper guru for tantric sadhana should not arise at all.

If the tantric guru is a sannyasin, so much the better, but a householder guru also fulfils the need. What is wanted in a tantric guru is for him to live the life of an average man. All other qualifications of a guru are not essential except that he should be proficient in his art and never use the powers for evil purposes.

Although a married householder has the authority to impart the knowledge, it should not mean that one can become a guru just because he is a householder. Since a householder is accepted as a responsible member of society and has a greater understanding of the average man, he is also allowed to act as a guru, provided he knows the science.

In India, brahmins who know this art and give initiation, just live the life of an average householder. But one must remember very well that the married life of a householder and that of a brahmin, and still more that of a spiritually minded brahmin is glorious, well planned and self-controlled. There is a great gulf of difference in ideals, outlooks, practices and results of the married life of a Hindu from that of an average Westerner. Even if such a guru has married two wives, there is nothing wrong. The Hindu

Shastras give sanction to such marriages in extraordinary cases where the question of progeny is involved. But such a guru devotes himself fully to the practices of tantra sadhana while he has disciples to take care of his material needs.

Sadhana in the burial ground

Sometimes a very ugly picture of a tantric is drawn with a human skull etc., sitting in a burial ground without any clothes, with drunken women. Well, all this never happens in tantric worship. In fact, tantra is far from this. The above mentioned ugly picture does not enjoy any sanction from Tantra Shastra.

Witchcraft should also not be mistaken for tantric systems, although the practitioner of tantra may develop certain powers. Since the cemetery and burial grounds, lonely forests and midnight hours are good for silent and uninterrupted meditation, because they are absolutely quiet and peaceful, the Tantra Shastra advises such places for worship and meditation. When the mind is given an atmosphere, then the mental tendencies become much quieter. In deeper states of meditation when the conscious mind loses its grip over the autonomic system, the inherent fear springs up and there is an explosion of psychic contents in the form of the collective unconscious. Even as situations in life are able to stimulate the lower psyche in individuals, likewise, the solitude, quiet and mysterious atmosphere of the burial ground or cemetery is able to develop the mystic and occult tendencies of one's deeper personality.

There is no better place in the world for meditation than in the burial ground, where the mind as a whole develops the awareness of fleeting life, meaningless efforts, awareness of death and many more valuable realizations.

Sometimes the aspirant uses wine in order to eliminate the first phase of fear. But it is a ceremony in order to stimulate the mind and brain to be able to dive deep into one's own self.

When you practise worship in the burial ground, it is not only this much. You have to practise the whole initiation in that heightened mental state for hours together and try to disassociate the psyche from the matter in different phases of awareness. When the consciousness of the aspirant dives deep into various layers of individual consciousness, then it has to overcome fears, forms, images, schizophrenia and finally establish itself in a state of tranquility. When the tremendous collective unconscious becomes manifest, the ego is separated from matter and the thing is seen face to face just like the reality. With this, one phase of sadhana ends.

The use of wine, sitting in the burial ground and placing a human skull does not make one a siddha, but one can utilize them to the best of one's spiritual advantage.

Cohabitation versus brahmacharya

Cohabitation, whether marital or extramarital is not an essential part of tantra; you can practise tantra with your wife if you have one, with another companion if so, otherwise without anyone if you are brahmacharin. Hindu marriage is a dharma, as much as brahmacharya is a great accomplishment. While a married householder fulfils a great dharma, a brahmacharin attains the highest state of existence.

Marital union is not unholy, yet it pricks the conscience; how then can one practise tantra when both acts are to be performed at night? How can one overcome the feeling of guilt and nervousness due to excitement. Therefore, the practitioner of tantra will have to spiritualize the marital act and make it an item of his tantric worship so that he remains free from the emotional concomitants of the act. Wise people included the actual marital act in the scheme of tantra in order to avoid guilt complexes, animal nervousness, psychological after-effects, forgetfulness of the spiritual purpose and finally to establish a deeper bond of union between husband and wife in the psychological,

social and spiritual fields. That is why maithuna is not outside of tantra, but is included in the scheme. Since it opens certain portions of the posterior pituitary and removes toxins stored in the sexual organs and elsewhere, it should not be considered unspiritual or anything like this. One should have a different understanding about beliefs and truth.

The practice of tantra is done at different periods. At night, in the early morning, at home, in the burial ground, in the company of one's wife, with other companions, or alone. It all depends on the evolution of the practitioner. While the beginner may be asked to perform worship at night with his wife, later on he and his wife may have to do the whole thing individually and live the life of spontaneous brahmacharya.

Brahmacharya is not renounced by tantra, rather it is enjoined, however, not quickly; it comes in stages. When one is established in spontaneous brahmacharya, then one is allowed to practise one's worship in the burial ground or in any other such place. After that one is allowed to practise in the morning hours when there is absolute steadiness in the atmosphere as well as in the mind. And here husband and wife have to practise the worship individually.

Tantric worship in burial grounds (*masan sadhana*) is enjoined for women also. It is not a collective worship in company with husband or wife; one has to practise masan sadhana individually. Morning worship of tantra is enjoined for husband and wife, but they have to practise it individually. The preliminary worship for husband and wife, guru and disciple, male and female companions is enjoined for both which they have to practise together.

So a tantric is not one with a hideous face, a dirty appearance, wearing deep red clothes, with bloodshot eyes and a terrifying personality. Those who have this image in their minds are ignorant people. A real tantric is a saintly personality.

They are yogis who are practising yoga in a different way for the development of that spiritual power which is hidden away under layers and layers of ego. Theirs is a much easier way, a way which most can walk upon. The tantric system has come to be misused and abused because misinformed people have developed vague and false images of a tantric and impostors are exploiting their self-styled definition of a tantric.

A natural process of self-realization

If I could tell you the details of tantric worship, the definition of deities, the science of mantras, the psychic capacity of beeja mantras with their use, the methods of meditation, the place, time and companions of worship, then you would at once understand that tantric sadhana is so powerful that not only the vagrant mind can be brought under control, but the higher elements of consciousness can also be brought under subjugation by any man.

Shiva and Shakti have individual as well as collective existence. They are the supreme awareness in every being. A complete manifestation of Shiva and Shakti is termed as samadhi by yogis, whereas Vaishnavas term it as Vishnu darshan.

Shiva is unqualified awareness in every being and Shakti is the matter, holding and manifesting this awareness. Shakti is directing the three gunas so individual awareness is functioning. Shakti is maya and avidya also. When the worshipper is propitiating Shakti, he is actually progressing through the process of pratyahara, that is, the withdrawal of sense awareness. The process of cessation of the modifications of individual consciousness is complete when the awareness of Shakti becomes revealed.

The state of higher consciousness as capitulated by a yogi is easily obtainable by the process of Shakti worship. The whole of tantra sadhana is therefore a process of realization of the highest in man. Other paths are not natural to the practitioner

and demand from him austerity, abstention, and the like. Tantra Shastra is the easiest because it does not ask one to renounce what is natural, but guides one to sublimate even the lowest urges of life and express the utterly insignificant.

Vedanta is a sublime philosophy, but it is purely intellectual. Even the practices of jnana yoga are negative, pessimistic, egoistic and purely mental. Raja yoga is a complete system, but makes a lot of impossible demands on an average individual, so much so that it produces numerous introverts, neurotics and inhibited personalities. Though it is an incomparable path, it lacks understanding of the average man. Bhakti yoga is the easiest path, but the problem is that it has no systematic blueprint of inner evolution and is filled with impossible concepts of ethics, purity, orthodoxy and incorrigible arrogance.

But the whole of tantra sadhana is a smooth way for everyone, which does not lay down a list of don'ts. It has practices for each individual walking on different points of evolution. Whether vegetarian or non-vegetarian, whether a brahmacharin or living normally, whether high born or a simple man, whether for moksha or for siddhis, whether selfish or unselfish, it is Tantra Shastra that gives you a way for yourself. Even sannyasins can practise tantra sadhana and develop higher powers and utilize them for the good of mankind. Maha Nirvana Tantra is the tantra for sannyasins, brahmacharins and hermits.

Still there are hundreds of ill-informed individuals who think that tantric initiation or practice compulsorily demands the five elements. For those the message is that Tantra Shastra is for them also. All those who have not succeeded in their sadhana, even though years have elapsed, should accept the tantric way of realization. In the Kali Yuga, when minds are no more pure, habits have degenerated, passions have burst out, faith in God is just a habit and life has become completely different, verily it is tantra that is the way for spiritually aspiring souls of both East and West.

Notes

Swami Satyananda was born in Almora (Uttaranchal) in 1923. Drawn to spiritual life from an early age, he left home at the age of eighteen, and in 1943 surrendered himself to Swami Sivananda in Rishikesh who initiated him into Dashnami sannyasa in 1947. He served his guru for twelve years, perfecting every aspect of spiritual life. Thereafter, he travelled throughout the Indian subcontinent as a wandering ascetic.



Realizing the need of the times as scientific rendition of the ancient system of yoga, he founded the International Yoga Fellowship in 1956 and the Bihar School of Yoga in 1963. During the next twenty years, Swami Satyananda hoisted the flag of yoga in every corner of the world, consolidated BSY into a foremost institution of yoga, and authored over eighty major texts on yoga, tantra and spiritual life.

‘Satyananda Yoga’ became a tradition which combines classical knowledge with experiential understanding and a modern outlook. In 1984 he founded the Yoga Research Foundation to synchronize scientific research and yoga, and Sivananda Math to assist the underprivileged. In 1988, at the peak of his achievements, he renounced everything and adopted kshetra sannyasa, living as a paramahansa ascetic. In 1989 Rikhia was revealed to him, where he came to live and performed higher vedic sadhanas in seclusion. Receiving the command to provide for his neighbours in 1991, he allowed the ashram to help the underprivileged villages in the region. From 1995 onwards, he performed a twelve-year Rajasooya Yajna with the sankalpa of peace, plenty and prosperity for all, and in 2007 he announced the establishment of Rikhiapeeth with its mandate to ‘serve, love, give’.

Swami Satyananda attained mahasamadhi, a yogic accomplishment of discarding the body at will to become one with the universal consciousness, in 2009, in the presence of his disciples.



SATYANANDA YOGA
BIHAR YOGA

An internationally known yogic figure and guru, noted for his fearless spirit, impressive orations, overflowing love for all, steady wisdom, and unsurpassed knowledge of the Vedas and modern science provides only a vague sketch of Swami Satyananda Saraswati.

This introduction to *Tantra Shastra* is a direct reflection of Sri Swamiji's unique ability to reveal and expose the eternal treasures and truths which are so often misinterpreted and hidden in the blind concepts and traditions of society.

In this booklet, compiled from lectures given at the International Yoga Assembly, Bihar School of Yoga, 1967–68, Swami Satyananda presents refreshing, interesting and knowledgeable explanations about this living science of self-realization.

